

Lectures in Linguistics 8

Dep. of English Language and Linguistics

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Pragmatics (Felicity Conditions)

Austin realized that context was an important factor in the valid performance of an illocutionary act. He noted that the participants and the circumstances must be appropriate. An umpire at a baseball game can cause a player to be out by uttering *You're out!* But an excited fan in the bleachers cannot. Likewise, the act must be executed completely and correctly by all participants. If a friend says to you *I promise I'll meet you at the movies at 8:00 P.M.*, but actually plans to be home watching T.V. at that time, the act of promising is not valid. Austin called the conditions felicity conditions.

Direct versus Indirect Illocutionary Acts

Particular sentence types are associated with particular illocutionary acts. For example, imperative sentences (*Bring me my coat*) are uniquely designed for issuing directives. Thus a directive delivered by means of an imperative sentence constitutes a direct illocutionary act. However, if another sentence type , for example an interrogative, is used to issue a directive (*Would you bring me my coat?*), then then such an utterance is said to constitute an indirect illocutionary act.

Direct Illocutionary Acts : the following table gives an example of each type of illocutionary act and its associated syntactic form (i.e., sentence type).

utterance	Illocutionary act	Syntactic Form
Keep quiet	Directive	Imperative
Do you know Mary?	Yes-no question	Yes-no imperative
How nice you are!	Expressive	Exclamatory
You are fired.	Declaration	Declarative

Thus , any time a directive is issued with a an imperative sentence, it constitutes a direct illocutionary act; anytime a yes-no question is issued with a yes-no interrogative, it constitutes a direct illocutionary act.

Indirect Illocutionary Acts : In general, an illocutionary act is issued indirectly when the syntactic form of the utterance does not match the illocutionary act of the utterance. Consider the following examples. For purposes of comparison the direct phrasing is given in parenthesis below each utterance.

Utterance	Illocutionary Act	Syntactic Form
You might give me a hand with this. (Give me a hand with this.)	Directive	Declarative
And you are... (who are you?)	Wh-question	Declarative
Could you keep quiet? (Keep quiet)	Directive	Yes-No Interrogative
Do you have the time? (what time is it?)	Wh- Question	Yes-No Interrogative
Can I give you a hand with that? (I can give you a hand with that)	Commissive	Yes-No Interrogative